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THE BEARING OF THE DOCTRINE OF SELECTION UPON THE SOCIAL PROBLEM.

How completely the attitude of cultivated circles towards the masses has changed in the course of a century is strikingly illustrated if we compare a significant remark in the "Wealth of Nations" with a weighty passage in Mr. Bryce's "American Commonwealth." In treating "Of the Wages of Labor," Adam Smith mentions what in his day was "the common complaint that luxury extends itself even to the lowest ranks of the people, and that the laboring poor will not now be contented with the same food, clothing, and lodgings which satisfied them in former times." He goes on in all seriousness, howbeit with a consciousness of running counter to the generally received opinion, to ask, "Is this improvement in the circumstances of the lower ranks of the people to be regarded as an advantage or as an inconveniency to the society?"—a query he briefly answers, as might be expected, by affirming and substantiating the general benefit to society of a higher standard of wages. This citation from Adam Smith gives us an inkling of the prevalent feeling among the English upper classes in 1776 towards the "laboring poor." To-day but few would think seriously of raising such an issue as to the social benefit of high wages or of solemnly defending a thesis to modern ears so self-evident.

Contrasted with this echo from the past is Mr. Bryce's depiction of one of the distinguishing features of the public sentiment of the present age. After commenting on the way in which the triumphs of science have influenced us by enlarging our ideas of comfort, he adds, "Still greater has been the influence of a quickened moral sensitiveness and philanthropic sympathy. The sight of preventable evil is painful, and is felt as a reproach. He who preaches patience and reliance upon natural progress is thought callous. The sense of sin may, as theologians tell us, be declining, but the dislike to degrading and brutalizing vice is increasing; there is a

warmer recognition of the responsibility of each man for his neighbor, and a more earnest zeal in works of moral reform."

So far am I from drawing any inferences flattering to our own age from the remarks of these two observers, that I freely confess that there is hardly less to condemn in the unctuous social sentimentality of this generation than in the selfish apathy of the last. Sentiment, after all, whether selfish or altruistic, is but the raw material of morality, and unless transfused by rational purpose is morally colorless. But what does appear from these remarks, both so representative of the two respective periods, is the changed attitude of the public mind towards social questions. It illustrates the contention so frequently made, that "the problem of social well-being is one which belongs peculiarly to the present time." The Sphinx has put tantalizing questions to other generations than our own; but to us her most common riddle is summed up in the so-called Social Problem. To state precisely what this problem is would require a long diagnosis, and such a diagnosis would probably issue in an attempt to unravel a plexus of mutually determining causes. Without attempting this nice task of social dissection, it is easy enough to sum up the external aspects of the case. Demos is grumbling over his lot, and Public Sentiment, instead of sharply telling him to accuse no man falsely and to be content with his wages, assures him of sympathy in his endeavors and interest in his condition. How much of this discontent is well founded is not here the question. But it may be worth our while to ask what considerations should determine our attitude towards the social problem. How high hopes of social betterment may we intelligently entertain? Or how complete must be the failure of reform before we may honorably throw away sword and shield and blindly submit to "the force not ourselves which makes for production"?

It is with an uneasy consciousness of bringing out of the economic treasure-house things old rather than new that I essay to revert to the law of selection as throwing a ray of light on this question. This law of selection is not indeed the only nor even the main determinant of one's attitude

towards God or man. But some things that law does say most emphatically, and these things it may be worth our while to rephrase.

It is not very surprising that the law of survival through struggle has encountered some sturdy rebuffs. Its early conquest of many positive sciences was so complete and so speedy that its extensive sway was easily mistaken for universal dominion. The ore extracted to-day from the Darwinian lode does not seem to dwindle very perceptibly in amount, but the most cautious assayers have gauged pretty conclusively its quality. Weighed in the scales of an impartial philosophical analysis we discover in the law of selection only a clue to certain genetic processes and no final theory of the universe. The most complete articulation of phenomena upon the framework of Development could not affect the dictum of the great English idealist, that knowledge can never be a part or product of nature in the sense in which nature is said to be an object of knowledge. But when all this is admitted, the question arises whether for purposes of social study we have exhausted the significance of the fact of "selective slaughter." I do not think we have done so, nor do I know of any question whose solution would more greatly advance our knowledge of human society than the question how far and in what ways the law of selection acts among mankind.

Our conception of "animated nature" has been revolutionized by the recognized fact of selection. We no longer think of Providence as a Great Game-Keeper who "providentially caters for the sparrow;" and there are few, I suppose, who would longer deny that the seeds of potential life, animal and vegetable, are enormously in excess of the number that can possibly be maintained alive, and that the resulting intensity of competition for subsistence makes the world at once a cock-pit and *crèche* where none but the ablest conquer and perpetuate their kind. There are perhaps adumbrations of another order of things even in the province of animal life. Mr. Drummond thinks to find the altruistic microbe in very early forms of life, and Mr. Leslie Stephen points out "a

system of tacit alliances" in the midst of this interminable conflict. Still, conflict is the rule and "tacit alliances" are admittedly the exception. And the question that presses home for answer is this: Does the law of selection operate in human society? does it prevail there in part, or unreservedly, or at all?

The answer is not difficult if we confine ourselves to general statements. This merciless struggle for mere existence is to some extent changed in human society, and the residual competitive process is altered so as generally to become a struggle for domination instead of a struggle for life. Such domination of the weak by the strong may be compatible with mutual service and profit. The area of competition is also narrowed so as no longer to cover the family circle. Within the family the weakest are by the sacrifices of the other members protected from the pitiless struggle to which the weak must succumb were family support withdrawn. So within the state the competitive plane has been raised, so that a predatory life to-day must be one of wits rather than of weapons. The competition of industry, where failure means loss of control over capital, has largely supplanted the competition of war, where failure meant slavery or death. Indeed, so altered and modified has the selective process in human society become that we may be tempted to believe this law of minor importance after all.

Such a conclusion, however, would be highly erroneous. The nature of the competitive struggle has been changed but in part, and the lower the descent we make in the social scale the harsher and more brutal becomes the aspect of the strife and the more apparent the proportion of those "unhappy persons who, in the great lottery of life, have drawn a blank." The higher mortality and the shorter average duration of life which characterize the "submerged tenth" as compared with the well-to-do classes (or which characterize the American negro as compared with the white race in this country), prove conclusively that on the margin of industrial society the unfit "perish," or, what comes to the same thing, they regularly meet an untimely end from the lack of adequate food, shelter,

clothing, and care. If their death differs from that of the beasts that perish, it is because society has decreed that the possession of property rather than mere physical prowess shall be the condition of survival on the new plane of social competition.

This is a very sobering reflection. It may even be pronounced dismal, but we shall not get away from this elemental fact in human society by reviling the phrase which embodies the truth. Seen in this light, the hackneyed saw that God never makes a mouth without providing two hands to feed it becomes a silly attempt to plaster with an epigram a putrefying sore. And the same might be said of Southey's remark that Malthus's doctrine asserts that "God makes men and women faster than he can feed them."

If, then, it be true that the selective struggle on the margin of industrial society is only a prolonged and peaceable version of the cruder struggle for existence in the animal world, what bearing will this fact have upon the social problem,—upon the general interest in and demand for the betterment of the condition of the lower classes?

First, it precludes all optimistic anticipations for the future of society. By this I do not mean that we may entertain no hope of any essential social betterment. But by optimistic anticipations I mean such as apprehend that society in the future will see the disappearance of material want and its attendant suffering. We Americans are much too prone to indulge in unwarrantable expectations of a roseate hue. Our old men dream dreams and our young men see visions with astonishing facility. There is much in our history to explain or even to excuse this tendency on our part. The subjugation of a continent gave such ample scope to enterprise that we had all but forgotten that our territory was not boundless. We are reaching the end of our tether and the unusual constraint galls us bitterly. Still, we do not despair. It is an article of faith with nine out of ten of us that the world is constantly growing better and happier, and that the future is sure to see the dawn of general social prosperity. Whether, indeed, this old world of ours is growing better or happier is a puzzling riddle.

The old reprobate seems, like many of us, to have his relapses into sin as well as his occasional fits of morality. Too often history shows the Puritan Commonwealth succeeded by the immorality of a Restoration to make us feel sure that the cosmic drift even in the long run is in any particular direction.

On one assumption the rigor of our first conclusion might perhaps be somewhat relaxed. If we could assume that the residual element of destructive competition in human society could be transmuted into the lively but non-lethiferous struggle for domination, there might be some ground for our taking an attitude, if not of optimism, at least of cheerful social anticipation. If the civilizing agencies of private property and family responsibility have largely localized social pressure, why may not the same trend of historic progress eliminate that pressure altogether? This suggestion the late Professor Huxley crushed in his lecture on Evolution and Ethics, where he said, "The cosmic nature born with us and, to a large extent, necessary for our maintenance, is the outcome of millions of years of severe training, and it would be folly to imagine that a few centuries will suffice to subdue its masterfulness to purely ethical ends." No race has ever yet appeared in any clime where reckless multiplication has not ultimately created, at least among some classes of the people, an environment whose inevitable outcome was suffering and want. And to suppose that we or our children shall ever see the day when the social swamp will be thoroughly drained is to indulge in a pleasant day-dream which finds no warrant in reason and no counterpart in experience.

But, second, *the persistence of the selective process in society sanctions no fatalistic attitude towards social betterment.* It is perhaps not wonderful that those to whom the naturalistic processes of development are an adequate philosophy of life and who reject volitional freedom as a delusion should fall into a fatalistic temper of mind. But there are other phases of feeling which engender the same kind of indifferentism. Social egoism a century ago found in its distorted version of Malthusianism something it somehow had "loved long since, and lost awhile;" something which "parried the demand for

reform and sheltered selfishness from question and from conscience by the interposition of an inevitable necessity." The feeling that it will be decidedly uncomfortable for us to help our neighbor is often the father of the conviction that it is really impossible to help him at all. The struggle for existence, we are apt to argue, is a hard fight, but, after all, it insures the survival of the best stock and the healthiest "social tissue." Or, our self-exculpatory *apologia* may take still another turn if we but dash it smartly with a cynical humor. Instead of pitying the inevitable misery of those who perish, or pampering the self-complacency of those who prosper, we may argue that the double process of survival and extinction is, after all, reciprocally beneficent to victor and vanquished. "The sheep," says Mr. Leslie Stephen, "that is preserved with a view to mutton gets the advantage, though he is not kept with a view to his own advantage. Of all the arguments for vegetarianism, none is so weak as the argument from humanity. The pig has a stronger interest than any one in the demand for bacon. If all the world were Jewish, there would be no pigs at all. He has to pay for his privileges by an early death, but he makes a good bargain of it. He dies young, and, though we can hardly infer the 'love of the gods,' we must admit that he gets a superior race of beings to attend to his comforts, moved by the strongest possible interest in his health and vigor, and induced by its own needs, perhaps, to make him a little too fat for comfort, but certainly also to see that he has a good sty and plenty to eat every day of his life."

Without attempting to answer *seriatim* these pessimistic views, it will be sufficient to indicate once for all why the fatalistic temper finds no warrant in the doctrine of selection as applied to society. The reason is simply this: that in the domain of social life there is no rigidly fixed boundary between the cosmic process and the ethical process, between the cut-throat struggle for existence and the elevated struggle for domination, between the natural body and the spiritual body, between the flesh and the spirit.

We may therefore with perfect consistency believe in the

existence of the fight for life on the social frontier, and yet hope to push back the barbaric struggle into somewhat narrower confines. "Social progress," as Professor Huxley has said, "means a checking of the cosmic process at every step, and the substitution for it of another which may be called the ethical process, the end of which is not the survival of those who may happen to be the fittest, in respect of the whole of the conditions which exist, but of those who are ethically the best." Rightly viewed, therefore, the doctrine of selection can be used neither to buttress social selfishness nor to justify social indifference. While the inevitableness of the struggle for life may sober our thinking on social problems, and while it may prompt us to disavow—perhaps regretfully—far-reaching schemes of social reform, it cannot wreck the ark of human hopes

"By making all the horizon dark."

Like St. Paul, "we are troubled on every side, yet not distressed; we are perplexed, but not in despair."

What has been said up to this point has borne chiefly on the frame of mind and temper in which we ought to view the possibility of social betterment. Nor is this a matter of small importance. But there is another—and a more practical—aspect of the doctrine of selection as applied to society, for this law is capable of concrete and explicit application to projects of social reform. We may put the case thus: *The doctrine of selection is a vantage-ground from which we may often view in true perspective social issues which, seen close on, are involved in obscurity and doubt.* Let us make sure that the scope of our proposition is understood. The doctrine of selection here means simply this, that the nearer races or individuals approach the level of the brutes, the more liable they are to the brute struggle for existence, and the more subject they become to the condition of "not enough to eat and liability to be eaten." This condition is not universal, but in one disguise or another it persists even in civilized society. It is not ineradicable, but it dies hard and disappears slowly. It is as much a part of the world of men as elasticity and extension are qualities of the world of matter. Again, when we assert

that the recognition of this elementary fact gives us a vantage-ground from which to view social issues, we neither affirm nor imply that survival in the struggle for existence is the final norm of conduct. We do not identify all conduct which tends towards extinction with wrong conduct, nor all actions which promote survival with right conduct, though upon the higher planes of civilized life right action and successful action tend to coalesce. All that we intend to convey by the proposition is this, that selection through struggle is a quantity we cannot expect to eliminate from the social problem, and that therefore we must judge of social duty and social conduct with reference to the actual stage whereon mankind must act its part. Let us put upon duty, social as well as individual, the highest interpretation and the most transcendent worth; let us find her origin not "in the chance play of subjective sensibility or the far-off echo of ancestral lusts," but in the "bosom of God, her voice the harmony of the world;" and still it is true that this lofty sense of duty must manifest itself in a world many of whose denizens "graze and wallow, breed and sleep," until they are cut down in swarms by pestilence or war, or more slowly and decorously removed by the invisible pressure of material want. The etiquette of a picnic is no model for the battle-field or the slaughter-house, and the stern requirements of social ethics must take into consideration other aspects of social regeneration than those which seek to relieve a momentary difficulty or seem to meet a temporary crisis. So far as society to-day is better off than primeval society, the uplift has come largely from two agencies: first, from the steady raising of the plane of competition so as to conform social rivalry to the moral conditions of mutual service; and second, from the persistent focusing of the residual pressure of destructive competition upon those who will not come up to the social and moral standard of an advanced civilization. Any plan of social reform which checks or neutralizes either tendency makes for darkness and not for light. The danger is that we may gauge plans of social betterment or reconstruction from too short-sighted a standpoint. It is against this danger that the doctrine of selection

ought effectually to protect us. Let me illustrate this point by two examples, one domestic and one international. The collectivist is continually agitating against the institution of private property,—of private property in land or in the material instruments of production or distribution. He asserts with truth that private property is “a terrible right;” that its essence is its enforceable exclusiveness in possession and enjoyment; that it traverses ideal justice if by that we mean equality of opportunity; that in practice it means that ample stores of food and clothing are constantly in the magazines of every great city while thousands of its inhabitants “even unto this present hour both hunger and thirst” and “have no certain dwelling-place.” Generous humanitarian sentiments revolt at the picture. Christian charity finds it intolerable, and rightly refuses to say it cannot be bettered. But let us beware lest in striking at the evils we deplore we destroy the institutions which render these very evils manageable. Property accentuates the differences between rich and poor, but it renders poverty a localized evil instead of an omnipresent pestilence. The institution of property, if it makes poverty possible, at least prevents it from becoming universal. “The more completely,” says Professor Hadley in his “Economics,” “you give the prudent and efficient man control of the results of his labor, the more do you localize the pressure of population upon subsistence and confine the effects of this pressure to a few. But give the children of the shiftless, by thoughtless charity or various systems of poor relief, the right to eat the substance of the efficient and prudent, and you will soon lose both the capital and the morality under which that capital has been created.” We shall doubtless see in future marked changes in the dividing line between public and private property. But an assault on the principle of private property pure and simple is a plea for a return to barbarism, no matter whether the plea mask itself under the guise of a new coinage law or stalk in the robes of what is called “Christian socialism.” Finally, I shall take an example of the way in which we might view an international obligation, provided we read our duty in the light of the doctrine of

selection. If we consider the condition of affairs in the neighboring island of Cuba, we see a large part of the native population in arms against the Spanish government. The insurgents are fighting for independence,—with what prospect of success it is perhaps impossible to say. On what grounds are we to decide where our duty lies? Is a war for independence so holy a cause that where possible we are morally bound, without exception, to aid the insurgents? Suppose the inhabitants of British India revolted against their rulers; where ought our sympathies to be enlisted? Has independence never resulted in anarchy far worse than any tyranny? These considerations may not suffice to decide the case in point. Indeed, the world's outraged human sentiment might require us to interfere in Cuba in favor of neither party, but against both. But the point we are contending for is simply this, that no adequate weighing of our conduct is possible without reference to the struggle for survival between nations. Mere grounds of *primâ facie* justice or immediate sympathy are not enough. Sometimes, as the law of survival teaches us, it is impossible to interfere at all between contestants with any good results. Suppose a European naval commander on a voyage finds two savage tribes bent on immediate conflict. Is he to aid either or to fire on both? If the good Samaritan finds the Priest and Levite both angrily engaged in an internecine quarrel, he may often with a good conscience pass by on the other side. Sometimes the result of intervention in the affairs of other nations or races is involved in great obscurity; and when debating our duty as a nation we may remember that when one is lost in a fog and without a compass it is a good rule to stand perfectly still. Sometimes when intervention could be attempted with clean hands the probable accretion of unworthy motives and the demoralization attendant on war may outweigh the anticipated good, as the melancholy history of the Crusades proves. While there may be exceptions, therefore, the virtuous nation, like the virtuous man, tends to use force mainly in self-defence. These considerations do not, of course, comprise all the factors which should determine our national duty in cases of this

kind, but they are considerations which demand careful attention in any intelligent determination of that duty, and they spring naturally from our viewing the matter from the standpoint of survival through selective struggle. The field truly is the world, but it is a world "that lieth in wickedness;" and to forego strategic advantage or to waste reformatory energy by refusing to view the world or society as they are is to squander our moral patrimony and to waste our moral resources.

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SUGGESTION AS A FACTOR IN SOCIAL PROGRESS.

ONE of the remarkable potencies in human development to which investigators have just begun to apply the scientific method is the part played in social progress by the form of influence known as suggestion. We have here disclosed for us a deep-reaching influence of which it would be difficult to exaggerate the scope. Even after parental care has been brought to bear upon the child in the home, the grown individual still needs the action of a social environment, since it is the constant, the normal influence of this environment which holds him to the particular stage of civilization which his society represents. For without some such process, the social units could not be kept sufficiently like each other in mental and moral characteristics to enable them to co-operate for social ends. The influence thus exerted differs from that of hypnotic suggestion merely in the fact that, instead of being made to us in a cataleptic condition by an operator, it comes from the people with whom we associate and from the community in the midst of which we live.

Recognition of these social influences and of their moulding power raises the question of the attitude of society towards the social unit, and we are at once reminded of the fact that by a psychological law, the evidences of which abound, the